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Title: National History, Personal Memory and Trauma in Select South Asian Fiction

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Synopsis

There have been the Two World Wars, the Jewish Holocaust, the Vietnam War, the 1947 India-Pakistan Partition, followed by the 1971 Bangladesh Liberation War, and Afghanistan War in the last hundred years. My research shall concentrate on the history of the South Asian nations, mainly Afghanistan, Pakistan, India and Bangladesh after the 1947 Partition. On examining South Asian history, we find a sustained preoccupation of the historians, scholars and researchers with the issues of 'said' and 'unsaid' memories and the gaps that national history has with personal memory. I will study the fiction written on the three countries, i.e., Pakistan, India and Bangladesh against the backdrop of the 1971 Liberation War and after; and also investigate the problematic past of Afghanistan under the Taliban regime and thereby locate how history is intrinsically related to personal memory in the space of family.

I will explore the significance of fiction in this domain, suggesting how these buried national histories and their impact when represented in fiction opens up possibilities of not only coming across alternative narratives or "polyversal narrative", but also allows a possibility of healing the unresolved wounds. I intend to explore how history is not a matter of past that can be safely pushed aside, but a significant factor that continues to influence and shape our present. The traumatic experiences and their memories continue to haunt our existence. I will attempt to explore whether representation in fiction is at all probable after a time lag. I will also investigate the significance of fictionalized narrative in representing these silenced histories and its impact. Finally, I will conclude my argument trying to suggest how fiction allows for an opportunity of healing, if not in real life, then through narrativization.

The novels I select are Khalid Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* (2004) and *A Thousand Splendid Suns*(2008) from Afghanistan, Kamila Shamsie's *Kartography* (2003), Sorayya Khan's *Noor*(2004) from Pakistan, Prem Rao's *It Can't Be You* (2010), Sreekumar Nair's *Interpretation* (2010) from India and Tahmima Anam's *A Golden Age* (2007) and *The Good Muslim* (2011) from Bangladesh which are exemplary in revealing their country's traumatic pasts. The questions I investigate are: What is the connection between national history and personal memory? Why is traumatic memory or experience, so unrepresentable? Is there any possibility of translating traumatic memory into narrative? How national history becomes a decisive factor in governing relationships within families? Why the novelists I focus on seem so preoccupied with their countries' buried histories? How far does the process of mourning and narrativization of trauma in fiction open up a curative possibility?

The Introduction will outline the research problem, its scope and relevance. I will also evaluate the existing literature on the subject of trauma and its narration in fiction. I will also try to explain the reason behind the preoccupation with trauma fiction in contemporary times. Chapter I will contextualize the theories on which my thesis shall be based. I will subdivide the chapter into following sections: Gap between national history and personal memory; relation between trauma and memory; how narrativization of buried histories and their memories offers scope for healing. Chapter II will study the ordeal of the Afghan people posited against the Taliban rule, as outlined by Hosseini in *A Thousand Splendid Suns*; followed by the Shia-Sunni discrimination represented in *A Kite Runner*. This chapter will examine how the characters in Hosseini's novels are trapped in the conflicting times of which they are a part. Chapter III will outline the ordeal of the Pakistani citizen in the backdrop of the 1971 War, especially from the perspective of the perpetrator. The novels by two Pakistani women writers, Sorayya Khan's *Noor* and Kamila Shamsie's *Kartography* depict the immediate and the long-term impact of the 1971 War on those surviving and how influential it becomes in determining relationships. Chapter IV will summarize how the Indians were not spared but tormented by the memories of the 1971 War, through a detailed discussion of the two novels *It Can't Be You* and *Interpretations*.Chapter V will study the conflicts that the civilian of Bangladesh had to suffer during and after the 1971 Bangladesh War. Anam's novel *A Golden Age* contextualizes the trial of the Bangladeshi people, focalized through a mother's perspective. The other novel of Anam, *The Good Muslim* highlights the plight of the birangonas, the war babies, the dictatorial rule, and the sectarian violence that is prevalent in Bangladesh, as a long term effect of the War.In conclusion, I will consolidate my argument exploring the above mentioned perspectives.

I shall employ the socio-historical, cultural, humanistic, psychological causes and contexts of trauma to study the interrelationship of history at national level and memory at individual level. I will also apply concepts from Psychoanalysis to contextualize the origin and nature of trauma; use concepts from New Historicism to study the reason behind the novelists' preoccupation with the troubled pasts of their countries. In my research I will explore the issues of gender violence, psychological trauma, child abuse, historical memory, traumatic memory, and the narratives of victims and perpetrators relegated to the margins of official history.

My next preoccupation is with 'History' and 'Memory', specifically national history and personal memory. The escalating concern with memory in recent times signifies the desire to reunite with unresolved traumatic past and to move towards a constructive future. Personal memory, unlike collective memory provides missing perspectives into history. It is precisely because of this juxtaposition of both personal and collective, that memory becomes a potential site of analysis. This preoccupation with alternate histories opens up a new dimension of reading into the fissures that official history did not acknowledge. I intend to explore the gap between national history and personal memory.

Finally, my concern is to explore the therapeutic value of fictionalized narrative. I will examine how fiction offers a medium to study the unresolved, unassimilated traumatic experiences and investigate whether this literal expression of the buried pasts puts forward a scope for reconciliation, if not complete, then at least partial. Fictionalized narratives in bearing witness to 'unheard' traumatic pasts present themselves as a curative medium. Hence, the process of healing initiated in testimony gets complete only in the presence of an attentive listener or through its narrativization in fiction, where the readers can relate to the characters.

Trauma refers to a person's emotional response to an overwhelming event that disrupts the previous ideas of an individual self and the standards by which one evaluates society. Unlike commonplace misfortunes, traumatic events generally involve threats to life or bodily integrity, or a close personal encounter with violence and death. The term 'trauma novel' refers to a work of fiction that conveys profound loss or intense fear of individuals on a personal or collective level. The traumatized protagonist in fiction brings awareness within the readers about the specificity of individual trauma that is connected to a larger social forces and cultural values or ideologies. Though trauma fiction depicts an individual or communities that suffer, the universalization that the fictional protagonist comes to attain represents the sufferings at the collective level.

For examining these issues in depth, I will probe into the dynamics of how relationships in family are tainted by the past. The characters of the novels that I focus on are entrapped in their histories and can not escape its power. In other words, I will examine the "historical trauma" of the survivors (LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma* 82). By studying the influence of the past on the present, I will try to outline the enormity of traumatic experience and its memories at the personal level. The project of remembering the traumatic past is not a simple iteration of alternative histories that oppose established national histories. It also serves to initiate awareness in the readers about the enormity of the injustice that leads to perpetuation of the traumatic experience.However, it is important to note that using memory and history to relate to the past is not without problems; questions concerning authenticity, strategies of remembering, and memory are deterrent factors.

One of the limiting factors of my proposal is restricting the countries taken up for investigation. I have limited myself to the history of South Asian nations; primarily Afghanistan, Pakistan, India and Bangladesh to maintain an ontological parity. Another major limitation is restricting the number of selected novels for investigation. In order to be succinct I have chosen to confine myself to the above mentioned texts. Furthermore, the difference in political scenarios of the countries may be another constraint of my proposal. However, even though the political turmoil may vary from one another, yet the ethical issues highlighted in these novels and their contexts unite them. To conclude, it is my hope that this research will add to the existing scholarship and knowledge by outlining the interrelation between history, memory, trauma, mourning, fiction, and healing.

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